All We Know

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/133322.

Rating: General Audiences
Archive Warning: No Archive Warnings Apply
Category: Gen
Fandom: Top Gear (UK) RPF, PINKWATER Daniel - Works, Alan Mendelsohn the Boy from Mars - Daniel Pinkwater
Relationship: Alan Mendelsohn/Leonard Neeble
Character: Jeremy Clarkson, The Stig, Andy Wilman, Leonard Neeble, Clarence Yojimbo
Additional Tags: Crossover
Collections: A Ficathon Goes Into A Bar
Stats: Published: 2010-11-14 Words: 3321

All We Know

by melannen

Summary

Apparently being married to the Deputy High Commissioner for Extra-Martian Transport means, like it or not, Leonard is the go-to guy for all the assorted fugitives, refugees, entrepreneurs, castaways, and very lost tourists that wind up stranded on Earth.

Notes

For intoabar, the prompt "Leonard Neeble walks into a bar and meets ... Jeremy Clarkson!"

Possibly contains spoilers for Top Gear S16. If you don't know Pinkwativerse, this is futurefic for Leonard's story, and I should, by all rights, have made them go to Findhorn rather than Buntingford, but everything else non-Top-Gear derived is absolutely canon.

Jeremy was used to the substitutes Stig arranged for these international specials being noticeably odd. Sometimes, indeed, they were just human beings who were more comfortable around machines than other people; some of them were odder than that, but the strangest ones generally stayed in the racing suit the whole time, did the job matter-of-factly, and then silently accepted payment in whatever form the Stig had specified, and disappeared.

This one, however, was in a class of his own.
He'd zoomed up to the dirt track in Vietnam accompanied by his own biker gang, all of them carrying musical instruments strapped to their bikes, and introduced them in a strong Midwestern American accent as the folk-music group "Clarence Yojimbo and the Laughing Alligators", "And if there's anyone at the BBC who's looking for the next new thing in roots music, man, you've got our number." The rest of the gang spent their time sniggering quietly at everything in view while Clarence did the time trials, which he insisted on doing wearing jeans, a full-face motorbike helmet, and a white leather jacket with an elaborate oriental dragon painted on the back, rather than the nondescript coverall the crew had procured.

He seemed human enough; and he certainly accepted his fee in ordinary British pounds eagerly enough (while mumbling something about his brother-in-law and monsoon season), but there was something just... slightly... off about him. He was tall, but not tall enough to be exceptional; and yet something about his proportions seemed wrong. His skin, eyes, and hair were all precisely the same golden brown color. And when he looked at you, he somehow seemed to be looking through you at the same time.

And then there was what he'd said to Jeremy as he was tucking the large wad of cash away in a tight trouser pocket that seemed far too small for it.

"Hey, man, when you see Stig-sama, tell him thanks for hooking me up with this gig, okay? Not that an enlightened master such as myself is so tied to the material that we were considering pawning Raymond's Strat or anything, but it's good to know that he's thinking of us. And, uh--" Yojimbo looked slightly shifty for a second. "Tell him his clutch-sibs still love him and want him to come home."

Jeremy blinked at him.

"Hey, man, I didn't tell them where he was or anything! There was a thing, and it just came up in conversation! And he really doesn't need to be so paranoid, all is forgiven, they swear. Listen, I know this dude, he's like that with the Martian High Commissioner." Yojimbo pulled what looked like an ordinary business card out of one of his saddle bags and handed it to Jeremy. "Tell Stiggy to tell him Clarence Yojimbo gave you the number, and if Stig decides he wants to go home, my guy'll get everything settled as smooth as yak butter."

***

They didn't end up using any of Yojimbo's Stig footage in the motorbike special. Andy decided to focus it more on the presenters than the bikes, and besides, most of the video had ended up weirdly fogged, which they were blaming on the local humidity, despite the camera crew loudly denying it was possible and claiming sabotage.

But Jeremy did (eventually) remember to pass on Yojimbo's message from Stig's family, and the business card, which didn't have a number on it. It said, in what looked like old-fashioned offset type, "L M Neeble, flotzics + llchwit, c/o Boris's Taco Shack, The Bronx, New York, USA, 6th plane, Earth. All nonsense returned in kind." The Stig took it in one gloved hand and looked at it, then slipped it somewhere into his suit. The sun glinted inscrutably off of his racing helmet. And then he turned and walked away.

It was over a year later when Stig approached him after the last filming day of the series and handed him a postcard. Jeremy raised his eyebrows, but took it. On the front it appeared to have a photograph of a large fog bank and the words "See Beautiful Lake Mishagoo".

The back was addressed to Stig's room at Dunsfold, and had international postage marking its origin as New York City. The text read "Stig - I'm not sure what more assurances I can give you through
the mail. If you're willing to meet in person, I can be at the MacTavish's in Buntingford at 6 pm (your
time) next Tuesday, and maybe we can work something out. Cheers, LMN."

It took Jeremy several seconds to make the connection to the old business card, but he finally did. "Is
this from Yojimbo's friend?"

Stig confirmed that it was.

"You've been corresponding with him?"

Stig allowed that he had.

"Why did you show me this? Are you going to the meeting?"

Stig conveyed that the answers to those two questions were linked.

"You want me to come along, make sure he doesn't try anything?"

Stig nodded.

That was how Jeremy found himself, next Tuesday, walking with the Stig into "MacTavish's Pub
And Lube Shop" on the High Street in Buntingford. Stig directed him to sit down at one of the tables
while he went up to order for them. Usually Stig was more than happy to let the others take care of
the ordinary bits of human interaction for him, but today he had seemed unusually determined to do
everything for himself. And MacTavish's Pub did in fact seem to be half lube shop; a dozen or so
tables or booths and a bar were crammed into half the building, while a low railing separated it from
a shop floor where a coveralled mechanic was changing the oil in an old Ford. Perhaps that was why
Stig seemed more sure of himself, but he still expected him to be awhile, as most shop assistants
weren't terribly practiced in understanding Stig's methods of communication.

Jeremy leaned his elbows on the table to wait, then grimaced and very carefully put his hands on his
lap, where they didn't have to make any contact whatsoever with the table cloth. Both sides of the
establishment seemed to think that grease of various kinds was an important ingredient in the
business.

"Excuse me, do you mind if I sit here?" someone asked him, in a distinctively American accent.
Jeremy was about to point out that nearly all the other tables were in fact empty, and being an
extremely out-of-place American didn't excuse that, when the newcomer added, "Oh, wow, are you
Jeremy Clarkson?" and sat down with his cup and chip butty without waiting for permission.

Jeremy made another face. He'd quite enjoyed it when he was exactly the level of famous that let him
get attention when he wanted it, and walk down the street unmolested the rest of the time, but
unfortunately he'd passed that point several long years ago. "Are you a fan of the show?" he asked
tiredly. Normally he'd deny it and segue into extravagant lies, but the man was bound to notice the
Stig any minute now, which would make that rather a futile effort.

He shrugged. "Not really, but my parents discovered BBC America last year, and they've decided it's
the best thing since plaid wallpaper." Jeremy winced. "Exactly," he continued. "And I have to say,
your stuff is preferable to Gordon Ramsay or Graham Norton, which are the only other things it
plays."

Jeremy gave him a closer look at that: he was somewhere in the long approach to middle-age,
starting to go bald and heavily built without quite managing "fat", and wearing jeans and an elderly
sport jacket that somehow looked indefinably rumpled; and he indulged for a moment in feeling
slightly depressed about the calibre of his fans.
"Hey, that must be the Stig!" the man said, inevitably, as he glanced at the bar. "Can he even eat human food?"

Jeremy raised his eyebrows tiredly. "Do you really think that if the Stig was actually an alien, we'd advertise it on telly every week?"

He shrugged. "When I was in middle school, my best friend went around telling the whole school that he was a Martian. His parents were born on Mars, and they went to Mars for their vacations, and they would some day go back to Mars to live permanently."

Jeremy started to say something, and thought better of it.

"I didn't believe him, of course. Nobody who was actually from Mars would go around telling people like that. Which means I was a bit devastated when the flying saucer actually showed up and took him home. I didn't forgive him for nearly a week even after he invited me for a visit."

Jeremy blinked at him.

"I supposed I should introduce myself at this point," the man added, offering him a hand. "I'm Leonard Mendelsohn-Neeble. Leonard is fine, but please not Lenny, there's a prophecy I'm still trying to shake off."

Jeremy shook the hand bemusedly. "So you work for the Martian High Commissioner, is that it?"

"No. Actually I'm a psychologist, more-or-less. But apparently being married to the Deputy High Commissioner for Extra-Martian Transport means, like it or not, I'm the go-to guy for all the assorted fugitives, refugees, entrepreneurs, castaways, and very lost tourists that wind up stranded on Earth and don't want to go through official channels for some reason. I'm used to it."

"And which of those is the Stig?" Jeremy asked, drawn in despite himself.

"Oh, probably halfway between a fugitive and a refugee. The story I got - from several sources, including Stig himself - was that he ran away from home quite some time ago because he thought his moiety was going to make him marry a diesel, and he's been afraid to go back ever since because he knows they'll be angry at him, and besides he didn't exactly emigrate with all the legal procedures. But they want him back, because he's apparently his clutch's least common accelerator, and they can't iterate without him. Plus they miss him and they promise never to bring up the diesel thing again, or prosecute the moving violations, if he just comes home."

"And does any of that make sense to you?"

"Not really. Saturnians, man. Even 12th-planers think they're weird. They say you should never shake hands with a Saturnian while wearing a digital watch unless you want it to be eaten, that Saturnians think whipped chicken liver goes with cherry jell-o, and that it's the only planet this side of the galaxy that doesn't have ducks."

Jeremy had resigned himself to this conversation consisting mostly of him staring at Leonard blankly. Fortunately, Leonard seemed to be used to that reaction (which boded well for his conversational ability with the Stig.)

"Don't worry, I suspect it's all just the usual racist bullshit. You should hear what they have to say about Earth people; the patronizing condescension is actually the least insulting of it."

At that juncture the Stig returned. He handed Jeremy a beaker full of something hot and brownish, and sat down across from Leonard with his own plate of scattered hex-nuts and some sort of motor
"Hello, Stig, I'm Leonard," Leonard said. "It's great to finally meet you in person at last."

The Stig was also pleased to see Leonard, but was still somewhat wary of his promises.

"That's understandable," Leonard said. "I take it you brought Jeremy along to chaperone? I'm sorry to drag you both all the way out here, but if I want to visit the UK it's actually a lot faster and cheaper for me to tune to Lemuria from Hogboro, take the Lemurian public teleport system out here, and then tune back to Earth at MacTavish's. I see they managed to find something you could eat, anyway. MacTavish's is generally good about that, even if they don't serve their famous pickleburgers over here."

Stig didn't mind coming to Buntingford, since Leonard had come all the way from America. He dipped one finger into the sauce dish to let the oil start to diffuse through the glove into his system.

Jeremy turned away and took a sip of his drink. He'd been expecting coffee, probably very bad coffee, but instead it was -- he took another sip. The only description that came to mind was that it was almost, but not quite, entirely unlike Nestle's Instant Hot Chocolate. "What is this stuff?" he asked involuntarily.

Leonard glanced at his cup and took a deep sniff. "It's fleegix!" he said happily. "I didn't know they were importing fleegix here yet. I haven't had any in months. Listen, Jeremy, would you mind getting me a cup while Stiggy and I get caught up?" He pulled out a wallet and handed Jeremy two paper notes.

Jeremy was about to hand them back as American money - they obviously weren't pounds - when he realized they weren't dollars, either. He didn't recognize the alphabet on them, and the person in the portrait had gills. "Right," he said. Given the way his day had gone so far, they were probably just as likely to take these as they were proper British money. He looked to the Stig, but Stig didn't think there was any danger in him stepping away for a minute or so. Jeremy stood up and turned toward the counter. "You take it black?"

"It's fleegix," Leonard said witheringly. "You don't adulterate good fleegix."

This was pretty transparently an attempt to get Jeremy out of earshot so that Leonard could get the Stig alone, and Jeremy fully intended to rush through the order and then position himself someplace where he could discreetly observe the conversation. But at some point in the course of tapping his fingers impatiently, waiting for the elderly man behind the counter to take half an hour to fill one cup, his brain seemed to decide that the most interesting thing in the shop was the car getting its oil changed across the floor. He found himself wandering over to watch with absorption while he sipped at the second cup of 'fleegix' and absentmindedly rubbed his belly.

In fact, he didn't come out of his strange reverie until the fleegix was gone, and he turned to see Stig and Leonard both standing up, solemnly shaking hands. He ambled over, trying not to show how unnerved he was by his unexplainable inattention. "Stig," he said. "Are you and Leonard finished with your business, then?"

Yes, they were.

"Did you work things out?"

Stig nodded. He still wasn't sure, but he was actually hopefully that he might be able to go home and see all his sibs again.
"That's fabulous. And he didn't try any sort of coercion on you or anything? No funny business?"

No, Stig would have known if he had.

Leonard cleared his throat. "I'm sorry for distracting you like that, Jeremy, but I thought Stig might be more willing to speak frankly without you glowering over his shoulder the whole time. And he said he didn't have a problem with it."

"That was you!" Jeremy said. "What about my problem with it?"

Leonard took a couple of steps back, nervously raising both hands. "Hey, hey, no harm done. I'm not actually very good at that sort of thing anyway. Believe me, if anything dramatic had happened, you would have still noticed."

Jeremy glared at him.

Stig asked him to please be reasonable and leave Leonard alone, he'd been nothing but helpful. Could they just go back to Dunsfold now?

"Fine," Jeremy said. "But I'm not sure I approve of your taste in friends."

Stig agreed that his taste in friends had always been very odd.

Leonard had sat back down at the table. "It was, despite everything, a pleasure to meet you, Jeremy. And, listen, if you need to get in touch with me about anything else, I'd be glad to help, Stig can give you my card."

They had a very interesting conversation on the ride back to Dunsfold.

****

The next evening there was a minor UFO flap over southern Surrey. Jeremy, quite glad to be done with both Top Gear and the weirdness that surrounded it for a few weeks, paid it very little attention. No attention at all, in fact, beyond Fin mentioning it over dinner, until several days later, when Andy called to ask him if he'd heard from the Stig.

"Not since Tuesday," Jeremy asked. "Why, has something come up?"

"He's gone missing," Andy said. "The caretaker said his food had gone uneaten, and that's never happened before. When I went by to check, the door to the Portakabin was hanging unlocked, his room was gone, and there was no sign of him."

"Ah," Jeremy said.

"Jeremy," Andy said slowly. "That was a very guilty sounding sort of ah. Do you know something after all?"

"...Possibly," Jeremy said. "It's sort of a long story. And not for public consumption. Meet you at Dunsfold tomorrow morning?"

Jeremy had expected to have to let Andy wring the whole story out of him - it wouldn't be fair to hide it, and besides, when Andy wanted to know something, Jeremy had long ago learned that he would spill eventually, one way or another. But it turned out he didn't have to: when they got to the track, they found a lumpy brown envelope taped to the door of the portakabin with Andy's name on it in Stig's odd blocky hand.
Andy raised an eyebrow, pulled it down, and went inside, with Jeremy following. The envelope held nothing but a few pages of writing and Stig's car keys. Andy pulled off the first sheet, read it quickly, and silently passed it to Jeremy, who skimmed it nervously.

It was a letter from Stig to Andy, explaining that he'd had an opportunity to go home to his family, one that he couldn't postpone and wasn't willing to turn down. He apologized to Andy for the short notice, but he had filled his contract for the series, and he was giving Andy his cars and his savings to use however he wanted.

"Well, that seems fairly clear," Jeremy said.

Andy glared at him. "And what did you have to do with this?"

"I may have played a part - a very small, and mostly accidental part - in getting him that opportunity."

Andy glared at him some more.

"What? You can't deny a man the chance to go home if he gets it!"

Andy sighed and crumpled slightly. "No, I suppose you're right. But what am I supposed to do with no Stig for next series?"

"You always knew that sort of thing might happen. That's why we've got Ben Collins and that fake memoir on retainer, isn't it?"

"That was supposed to be in case some sort of top secret government agency started wanting to drag him off to an underground lab, not in case he hitched a ride on a UFO and went back to Mars!"

"Saturn, not Mars. Though they probably had a stopover at Mars on the way," Jeremy said. "Anyway I'm told that none of the government agencies actually have any idea what's really going on; the lizard men, the pod people, and the alien thought-forms that control all estate agents make sure they stay too incompetent to pose a threat, not that that would take much effort."

Andy stared at him.

Jeremy smiled back. "Did you know Graham Norton is actually a lizard man in disguise? The lizard people love chat shows and he decided to try to branch out to a larger audience, according to the Stig."

"My life," Andy said in a voice of despair. "How has it come to this?"

"Oh look," Jeremy said brightly, poking through the envelope. "He included a list of possible replacements, if we want to carry on! I wonder how many of them are oxygen breathers?"

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!